

Projector shines as computer link

There are many portable overhead projectors on the market, but only one — the Elmo HP285S — has the ability to use the newly introduced "electronic transparencies."

An electronic transparency enables a user to project on a large screen whatever appears on the monitor of a personal computer. The device looks like a see-through computer screen and it sits on top of an overhead projector.

Instead of the operator manually placing acetate transparencies on top of the projector, the device does all the work, directing the computer output to the projector.

It's wonderful for presentations and training sessions because it utilizes a common overhead projector rather than an expensive and difficult-to-set-up video projector.

Electronic transparencies are the hottest new gadgets around, and I love them. At \$800 to \$1,600 each, they're selling like hot cakes. They're already being used by thousands of companies for daily presentations.

Only overhead projectors that project the light from below the transparency can use electronic



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transparencies, however. Also, despite many, many models of portable projectors available, I've been able to find only one that works with electronic transparencies — the Elmo HP285S.

This will be unhappy news for many people who already use portable overhead projectors that are smaller and lighter than the HP285S. The most popular ones are marketed by Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Corp., and are about half the folded-up size of the Elmo unit.

The portable 3M projectors operate on a different principle: the bulb is above the transparency, not below, and reflects off a mirror underneath and back up to a lens that projects it on to a screen. The effect is that double or badly focused images are produced when an electronic transparency is used.

Available from Elmo Manufacturing Corp. of New Hyde Park,

New York, the HP285S is the smallest projector to offer an underneath light source. It's a nicely engineered piece of equipment, and more than measures up against the slightly larger models we tested, such as Elmo's own HPL290.

Both of these machines offer the requisite underneath light source, both are portable, and, the HPL290 is even a little lighter, weighing in at 16.5 pounds to the HP285S's 19.2 pounds. There are, however, some very clear advantages to the HP285S.

■ Although both Elmo models are approximately the same size when set up, the HP285S holds a definite edge in the folded-up position. With a folded depth of only 5 inches, compared with 9 inches for the HPL290, the HP285S is roughly the thickness of a large briefcase. It can slip easily under a standard airline seat while the other can't.

■ The ease of set-up and breakdown on the HP285S is nothing short of amazing. In just seconds, even a first-time user can pop open the top, lift the focusing column and lens that automatically extends a self-contained pedestal base, lower the top, plug in the retractable cord, and be ready to go.

This is in sharp contrast to the HPL290, with its detachable focusing column that must be attached by a wing-nut, its removable lens, and its cord that must be stored in the projector body.

■ Though smaller in size, the HP285S is larger in capacity. It offers a projector distance of 4 to 12 feet, vs. 4.9 to 10.5 feet for the 290. The HP285S can project an image ranging from 3.2 to 9.8 feet, compared with 3.7 to 8.3 feet for the 290.

■ While the HP285S lists at a slightly higher price, \$489 to the HPL290's \$415, it comes with a standard feature — built-in quick lamp change — that costs extra with the HPL290.

The bottom line: The Elmo HP285S is a good buy for salespeople and others who give frequent presentations and want a portable overhead projector that can operate with electronic transparencies.

Hillel Segal's column has been broadened to include evaluations of gadgets, seminars and books designed to enhance business productivity. Segal is a management consultant based in Boulder.